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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE HOME.

FROM its very success modern Bible study is exposed to certain evils. There is danger of the triumph of the mercantile spirit in the production and sale of Sunday-school helps; there is danger that, because of the great demand for teachers, untrained and inexperienced persons may take charge of the young during their most formative stage; there is danger lest the pastor should believe that the Sunday school relieves him from giving biblical instruction to his people. Yet it is not to any of these dangers that we would call attention at this time, but rather to one which seems more fundamental and serious than any one of them all—the decline of family religion.

*SHALL THE
SUNDAY SCHOOL
SUPPLANT
THE PARENT?*

A consideration of the situation in the Christian world today will convince almost any impartial person that one of the most serious conditions confronting the church is the neglect of religious instruction and religious worship in the families of church members. This, of course, is not to say that the standard of morality in Christian families is lowering. We do not believe for a moment that such is the case. But parents do not now commonly instruct their children in religious matters, unless indeed all happen to be members of the same Sunday school. The Sunday school has, in fact, become almost the only means of inducting children into the teachings of the Bible. It is true that there are homes in which one or the other parent assists the child in the study of the Sunday-school lesson, but it is to be feared that these are proportionately few in number. In the

great majority of Christian homes the parents seem to judge their duty as regards religious instruction complete when they have seen that the children are properly dressed and sent to Sunday school. Even the habit of churchgoing is not inculcated; instead, after a more or less edifying session in the Sunday school, the children are left by churchgoing parents to their own devices.

Quite as serious as this disregard of home instruction in religious matters is the decline of family prayers. We venture *SHALL THE FAMILY ABANDON WORSHIP?* the opinion that family worship is not maintained in fifteen per cent of the families of members of our churches. Even if the percentage is somewhat larger, the situation would be serious enough. How are we to expect that children will grow up in the fear and admonition of the Lord if, on the one side, parents give them no instruction in the Bible, and, on the other side, they never see their father or mother engaged in formal worship except in church? It perhaps will be replied that the work of the Sunday school makes such instruction unnecessary, and that the rush of modern life makes family worship impracticable. For our part we believe neither statement except with large reservations. It is true that the Sunday school has to a certain extent relieved the parents of the necessity of instructing their children in religious matters, but it has by no means made unnecessary a recognition, in the family circle, of God as the director and protector of life, and of the Bible as the source of moral and religious teaching. If our religious life has really ceased to be a matter that concerns the family, and is so far institutionalized as to relieve the parents of all obligations except to bring the child to the institution, pessimism as regards its future is justifiable. A nation whose families neither give moral and religious instruction, nor habitually recognize the presence of God, can hardly expect its children to grow up as God-fearing citizens.

Is there any remedy for the existing situation? Or must we allow matters to proceed until by very reaction Christian people

arouse themselves to reform? It seems to us that remedies are at hand which are both practicable and effective.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE REHABILITATION OF FAMILY WORSHIP 1. Let pastors urge the re-establishment of family worship in every family connected with their churches. If need be, let them form a sort of society, the members pledging themselves to maintain family prayers on Sunday, and, whenever possible, on every day in the week.

2. Let each pastor in presenting the matter suggest certain ways of conducting family prayers which shall relieve them of the difficulties with which they are commonly beset. For instance, for those men who find it impossible to make prayer, let him recommend a book of devotion which will contain prayers which when read will express the real desires of the Christian heart. Or, if one objects to the reading of prayers, let there be recommended the custom of each member of the family either repeating or reading some verse, or passage of Scripture, and of all joining in the Lord's Prayer. But whatever particular form family worship may take, let the pastor urge that at least there be reading of the Scripture each morning in every Christian family.

We venture another suggestion which may be found serviceable, at least for Sunday mornings or in families where there is no haste on the part of any of its members to leave home for the day's duties. The outlines of the American Institute of Sacred Literature are well adapted for devotion; and if these, or similar outlines, were once used, though the period of morning worship might be prolonged a few moments, it would undoubtedly cease to be merely formal, or mechanical. The Bible would not merely be read, but it would be actually considered. If to such use of the Scriptures there were added some brief prayer, either extempore or printed, not only would the day begin as every day should begin in a Christian family, but the family would be fulfilling one of its functions which, as has already been said, it seems to be overlooking. Children thus trained in the home would be better prepared to receive the teaching of the Sunday

school, and would greatly benefit from the parental example of publicly recognizing God in daily life.

There may be families whose circumstances are such that daily study and even daily prayers on the part of all their members are impracticable. There may even be families so deeply religious as to shrink from anything that in a remote way suggests religious formality. These exceptions, however, do not greatly weaken our contention. Even in their cases it is a fair question whether the mother or some other member of the family might not take up a work from which the father is for some reason excluded, and whether a little thought might not insure spontaneity in devotion. And, after all, it is not a matter of persons and methods, but of responsibility for the religious education of the child. No parent who neglects this has met the obligation of parenthood. To clothe, to feed, to send to school, to fit for some career—these are by no means all that a parent owes the child. Beyond them all is moral and religious training. Even more than the Sunday school, the home has remained untouched by the great movements which have given us new schools and new civic and social ideals. Until it realizes its functions and co-operates with the Sunday school and the day school, society will be in unstable equilibrium. And the first step it must take is the rehabilitation of the study of the Bible and of family worship. The parent can teach as no teacher, the family is above all schools. The time has come when it must realize these facts and become once more an influence in the religious life of the church.

*PARENTAL
RESPONSIBILITY
FOR THE
RELIGIOUS LIFE
OF THE CHILD*